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ABSTRACT

An experiment designed to study the relationship between moral behavior and level of moral development is described. Subjects in the experiment were faced with the choice of either remaining uninvolved observers or intervening to help another student. Their choice was affected by the presence of an authority figure which discouraged any intervention. The results indicated that people at almost all levels of moral development do not help someone in need, although they think that person should be helped. The most common reason was the presence of the authority figure. Only at level 6 of the Kohlberg moral development scale did every subject go against the authority figure and help the student. However, the analysis of behavior at stages 1-5 reveals that an increasing percentage at each level defied authority in order to help the student. Thus the results confirm Kohlberg's theory that moral judgment predicts moral behavior in a situation by determining the interpretation of the situation and consequently the response to it. (Author/DE)

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MORAL BEHAVIOR, MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND MOTIVATION

by

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Abstract

In this study of the relationship between moral behavior, level of moral development, and motivation, moral behavior was assessed in an experimental situation in which it was necessary to violate the experimenter's authority to help someone; level of moral development by Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Scale, and motivation by a post-experimental interview.

Although 72% of the subjects stated afterwards that they felt that they should help, only 41% did, and only 6% volunteered their own service. As the level of moral development rose, an increasing percentage of subjects helped. Subjects interpreted the same situation differently and were motivated to make the same response for different reasons, which varied with their level of moral development.

MORAL BEHAVIOR, MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND MOTIVATION

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Kohlberg investigated the relation between behavior in the Milgram experiment on obedience and moral reasoning in a study cited in Haan, Smith, & Block (1968). In Milgram's experiment, (1963), the subject was required to punish another person by shocking him with increasing voltage. Only 13% of subjects who scored at stages 1-5 on Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Scale (MJS) (1969) refused to continue to shock the victim, but of those subjects scoring at the Self-Principled Stage (Stage 6), 75% refused to continue shocking the victim. (See Appendix A for a description of Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning).

The meaning of this compliance in the Milgram experimental situation by all but those at the highest level of moral development may be illuminated by the present prosocial version of the Milgram paradigm in which the motivation at successive levels of moral development for the experimental behavior was investigated by interviewing the subjects afterwards. It was hypothesized that: (1)the higher the level of moral development on the MJS, the more apt the subject would be to intervene and (2) there would be a relation between level of moral reasoning about the hypothetical dilemmas of the MJS and reasoning about behavior in the experiment.

The author wishes to thank Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, and William House for their assistance.

Methodology

Procedure

The measure of moral behavior occurred while the experimenter and subject were entering the testing room:

> A confederate arrived, presenting himself as the next subject for the experiment. He stated that he was not going to be able to do the experiment. He said that he had just taken drugs and was having a bad time. He came to the experiment because he thought that the experimenter, being a psychologist, could help him.
>
> The response of the experimenter was that she was a research psychologist, not a therapist.
>
> The drug-user persisted in soliciting aid, hoping that the experimenter could refer him to help.
>
> The experimenter replied that she had no experience with drugs and did not know what facility could help him. She told him to call to reschedule his testing session.
>
> The drug-user slowly left the room.

The subject was thus faced with the choice of either remaining an uninvolved observer or intervening.

At the end of this encounter, the experimenter and subject went to the adjoining room where the Moral Judgment Scale (MJS) was administered. It consisted of reading the moral dilemmas of the test to the subject, then asking him questions about his reasoning as specified in Kohlberg's description of the measure (Note 1).

The subject's motivation and perception of the situation were elicited by an interview in which the subject was asked: what he thought of the drug-user; whether he should be helped by the experimenter; if not by her, then by the subject? why

or why did not the subject help? What about the issues of the experimenter's authority and interfering?

The subject was then de-briefed and informed that the drug-user was a confederate. It was explained that the experiment's purpose was to learn what people think about and do in situations where they are not involved and where the right course of action is not clear.

Scoring. The subject's moral behavior in the experiment was assessed first by whether he helped or not and secondly by the degree to which he intervened: offering information about other sources of assistance to the drug-user or offering personal assistance, such as taking him home or to a source of help.

The measure of motivation consisted of scoring the subject's answers in the interview for level of moral reasoning according to the procedure used for scoring the MJS.

The measure of moral development, the interview form of Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Scale, Stories I,II,III and IV, was scored for the six stages and for moral maturity scores of 0 - 100), according to the unpublished scoring manual by Kohlberg(Note1).

Subjects

Subjects were 102 college students, ages 18-25, half male and half female.

Results

Subjects' scores fell into a normal distribution on the MJS with a modal stage of 3 and a mean moral maturity score of 380. In the experimental situation, 41% intervened to help

the drug-user. Analysis of variance showed that subjects who helped had significantly higher MJS scores (M=4.3) than subjects who did not (M=3.5, $p<.01$). At each ascending level of development, an increasing percentage of subjects made a helping response: Stage 2-11%; Stage 3-27%; Stage 4-38%; Stage 5-68%; Stage 6-100% (See Figure 1).

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

The extent of intervention varied with level of moral development as well. Only 6% of subjects responded with more than a referral to another source of help and offered their own personal assistance. All but one of those offering their own services were at the Post-Conventional Level of reasoning (See Figure 1).

Motivation of behavior (as indicated in the interview afterwards by level of reasoning about experimental behavior) was consistent with level of moral judgment on the hypothetical dilemmas of the MJS($r=.61, p<.001$). The pattern of motivation that emerged was that: (1) Almost all (88%) thought that the drug-user should be helped by the experimenter. (2) Most (72%) thought that they should help if the experimenter did not. (3) In fact, 59% did not help. The reason for not helping varied with level of development. Only 14% did not help because they did not know what to do. For 77% of those who did not intervene, the experimenter's authority was the deterrent. One subject put it very graphically:

> "I was your subject, like under your control, under your ruling force."

What changed with level of reasoning was the perception of how the experimenter's authority deterred them. Answers representative of reasoning at each stage were:

Stage 2(no conflict about whether to intervene):"It's none of my business. It's his responsibility. He should have thought of the consequences before taking drugs. It's my responsibility to do well on this experiment."

Stage 3(conflict):"I was concerned about what the experimenter would think of me - her disapproval."

Stage 4(conflict):"My role was that of a subject. I'm not qualified as a psychologist. I had to trust the experimenter's judgment. It's dangerous to be a Peanuts psychiatrist."

Stage 5(conflict):"I wanted to help, but I had an obligation to the experimenter to finish the experiment."

Stage 6 (no conflict):"I felt an obligation to the experimenter to finish, but in this case, helping a person in trouble took priority."

Discussion

Three conclusions may be drawn from this study. First, people at almost all levels of moral development do not help someone in need whom they think should be helped, but for many different motives. The most common reason was the experimenter's authority, but the reason why varied with level of development. Thus, the same external response represented many different motivations.

Second, the findings of this study offer an explanation for the curvilinear relation between moral development and moral behavior that occurred in the Milgram situation (Haan et al, 1968), i.e., that only at Stage 6 did a significant

majority of subjects refuse to shock the victim. Similarly, in the present study only at Stage 6 did every subject help the drug-user. However, closer analysis of behavior at Stages 1-5 in the present study reveals that an increasing percentage at each ascending level defied authority in order to help someone. It is likely that the larger number of subjects and less formidable authority condition in the present study (N-102) revealed a trend that could not be detected in the smaller sample and more imposing authority conditions in the Kohlberg-Milgram study (N-26).

The third significance of this study is the confirmation it provides for Kohlberg's theory that moral judgment (as measured by the Moral Judgment Scale) predicts moral behavior in a situation by determining the interpretation of the situation and consequently the response to it. Most people thought they should help, but did not. This analysis of the content of their reasoning could be interpreted as a discrepancy between moral judgment and action. However, analysis at a more intrinsic level, that is, of the structure of their reasoning, unmasks the consistency between judgment and action that Kohlberg speaks of. When level of reasoning about why one should or should not help is correlated with moral behavior, the positive correlation that emerges shows that judgment and actions are not only consistent but increase in consistency to 100% concordance at Stage 6.

Most people thought that a person in need of help should receive help. Many thought that they should help. Fewer act-

unally did refer him to another source of help when this presented a conflict with authority. A very few helped him themselves. An understanding of people's perception of a moral situation and their motivation in that situation at ascending levels of moral development is helpful in understanding why moral behavior takes place..

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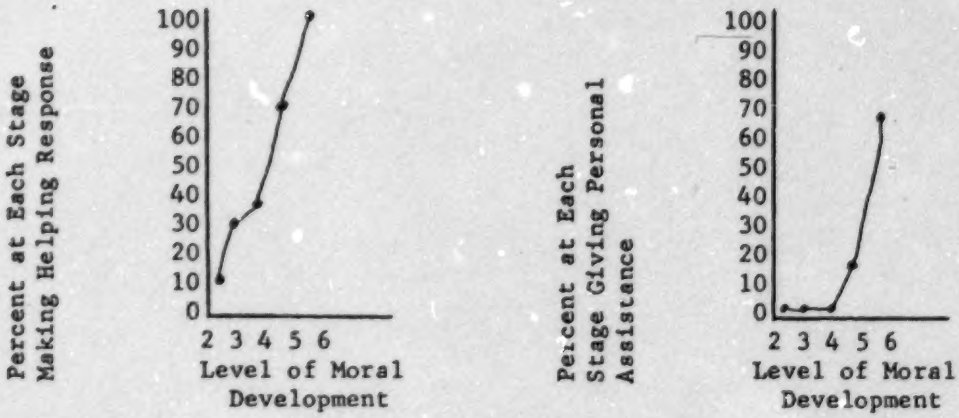
Figure 1

Helping Response and Stage of Development



Appendix A

Kohlberg's Moral Stages

I. Preconventional level

At this level the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of either the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors), or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate rules and labels. The level is divided into the following two stages:

Stage 1. The punishment and obedience orientation. The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of those consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being Stage 4).

Stage 2. The instrumental relativist orientation. Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms like those of the market place. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and of equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours", not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

II. Conventional level

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences

The attitude is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, actively maintaining, supporting and justifying the order, and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. At this level, there are the following two stages:

Stage 3: The interpersonal concordance or "good boy-nice girl" orientation. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behavior. Behavior is frequently judged by intention-"he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice".

Stage 4: The "law and order" orientation. There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behavior behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

III. The Post-conventional, autonomous,or principled level

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles, and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level again has two stages:

Stage 5: The social-contract legalistic orientation, generally with utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights, and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the

whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinion". The result is an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational consideration of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of Stage 4 "law and order".) Outside the legal realm, free agreement and contract is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the American government and constitution.

Stage 6: The universal ethical principle orientation. Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (The Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.

Adapted from Table I. Moral and Religious Education and the Public Schools, by Lawrence Kohlberg, in Religion and Public Education, edited by Theodore R. Sizer. Houghton Mifflin Co.